

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

1. (Previously Presented) A method for separating letters in which irregularly spaced and disordered piles of letters that are being transported on a conveyor belt are rendered into a continuous stream of letters that are largely not lying on top of each other and that are distributed virtually homogeneously over the conveyor belt, the method comprising rotating at least one retention plate affixed at an axis of rotation in a radial orientation with respect thereto around the axis of rotation that is arranged crosswise to a conveying direction of the conveyor belt, horizontally and above the conveyor belt in such a way that a retention plate situated below the axis of rotation has a speed component in a direction opposed to the conveying direction of the conveyor belt.

2. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 1, comprising rotating several retention plates around the axis of rotation.

3. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, comprising varying the distance between the axis of rotation and the conveyor belt.

4. (Previously Presented) A device for separating letters that renders irregularly spaced and disordered piles of letters that are being transported on a conveyor belt into a continuous stream of letters that are largely not lying on top of each other and that are distributed virtually homogeneously over the conveyor belt, the device comprising an axis of rotation that is arranged crosswise to a conveying direction of a conveyor belt, horizontally and above the conveyor belt, and one or more retention plates affixed at the axis of rotation in a radial orientation with respect thereto and rotatable around said axis of rotation, wherein the rotating retention plates can be driven in such a way that, in at least one operating state of the device, they have a speed component that is opposite to the conveying direction of the conveyor belt whenever they are below the axis of rotation.

5. (Previously Presented) The device according to Claim 4, wherein angular distances between the retention plates are the same.

6. (Currently Amended) ~~The device according to Claim 4~~ A device for separating letters that renders irregularly spaced and disordered piles of letters that are being transported on a conveyor belt into a continuous stream of letters that are largely not lying on top of each other and that are distributed virtually homogeneously over the conveyor belt, the device comprising an axis of rotation that is arranged crosswise to a conveying direction of a conveyor belt, horizontally and above the conveyor belt, and one or more retention plates affixed at the axis of rotation in a radial orientation with respect thereto and rotatable around said axis of rotation, wherein the rotating retention plates can be driven in such a way that, in at least one operating state of the device, they have a speed component that is opposite to the conveying direction of the conveyor belt whenever they are below the axis of rotation, wherein one or more of the retention plates has a smaller extension in the radial direction relative to the axis of rotation than at least one other retention plate (15).

7. (Currently Amended) ~~The device according to Claim 4~~ A device for separating letters that renders irregularly spaced and disordered piles of letters that are being transported on a conveyor belt into a continuous stream of letters that are largely not lying on top of each other and that are distributed virtually homogeneously over the conveyor belt, the device comprising an axis of rotation that is arranged crosswise to a conveying direction of a conveyor belt, horizontally and above the conveyor belt, and one or more retention plates affixed at the axis of rotation in a radial orientation with respect thereto and rotatable around said axis of rotation, wherein the rotating retention plates can be driven in such a way that, in at least one operating state of the device, they have a speed component that is opposite to the conveying direction of the conveyor belt whenever they are below the

axis of rotation, wherein an end piece of at least one of the retention plates is configured elastically in alignment with the radius relative to the rotational movement of the retention plates (15, 15').